HARAMBEE FLAME

VOL. II No. 3 August-September 1981

A FICTIONAL INTERVIEW WITH A NICE GUY

Editor: Mike, before we really get into this interview, I want to say that I've spoken with a couple of your spokesmen for the Black community and they say you're a nice guy. Do you mind my calling you by your first name?

Mayor: No, of course I wouldn't object to your calling me "mayor."

Editor: Okay, Mike. I'd like to speak with you about the issue of the North Freeway...

Mayor: You know we're thinking about calling it the Dr. Martin Luther King Freeway.

Editor: Yes that is very nice. However, the point I want to raise is that a lot of people in the Black community say they don't want this freeway. How do you respond to this?

Mayor: Well I'd like to say this about that. You know, we live in a democracy and everyone has a right to speak his mind. And I want to state, right here and now, that I throw the full weight of my office behind that right.

Editor: Mike, that does do my heart good. Nevertheless, should it become evident to you that a majority of people in the Black community do not want this freeway, will it be built anyway?

Mayor: By the way, did I tell you that we're thinking about naming the freeway after Dr. Martin Luther King?

Editor: Yes you did. But you have not answered my question. I...

Mayor: Er, uh, we have been working with the Defense Department on an optional plan...

Editor: The U.S. Defense Department?

Mayor: That's correct but I want you to keep this under your hat. I don't want our negro citizens getting their hopes up prematurely.

Editor: My lips are sealed.

Mayor: Have you heard of the MX missile system?

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TAKE HEED!!

Before you do anything, Brothers, think about it because being confined is not where it's at. You will find yourself without a friend, without anyone who can understand the loneliness of being behind bars. -Henry McCray

THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE, BUT

Recently the KZUM "Malone Reaching Out" program conducted a call-in session on the question of relations between American-born Afrikan men and White women. While the session was interesting, the phoned-in comments generally indicated, at least in the view of the FLAME editor, a rather regrettable lack of cultural/political consciousness on the part of the callers. It is hoped that this lack of consciousness is not characteristic of American-born Afrikan men in the city of Lincoln generally.

A comment heard at least a couple of times, and one that is not particularly uncommon, was that color makes no difference. Certainly, color should make no difference. The fact is, however, that we American-born Afrikans are oppressed as a group. We need each other!

FROM OTHER SOURCES

".....Recently, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Ben Vereen, and several others have changed their minds about performing in South Africa at the insistence of (Jesse)Jackson and other American intermediaries.

One entertainer who did not change her mind about going-but who will surely never be invited back-is raunchy soul singer Millie Jackson.

A few months ago, Ms. Jackson was scheduled to perform at the new, white-financed, multiracial entertainment center at the resort complex of Sun City. Ms. Jackson, as it would later turn out, was not concerned that few Blacks could attend performances there because they couldn't afford it. The audience was primarily white and Indian.

Upon her arrival, Ms. Jackson was asked whether she intended to perform in the Black township of Soweto, where she was immensely popular.

'Soweto?' Ms. Jackson replied. 'Where is that place? I've never heard of it.' Adding insult to injury, Ms. Jackson then told a local newspaper reporter; 'I'm not a politician. And I am not going to mix my career with politics. All I want is the money.'"

-excerpted from ST. LOUIS ARGUS(8/27/81)
(Emphasis added)

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"....A graphic way of looking at the insanity of the U.S. military budget has been done by Seymour Melman, professor of industrial engineering at Columbia U. and author of The Permanent War Economy. ....The cost of two B-1 bombers, $400 million, equals the cost of rebuilding Cleveland's water supply. The program, $34 billion, could modernize America's machine-tool stock. The cost overr-run of the Navy's Aegis-cruiser program, $8.4 billion, could pay for all the research and development needed to make automobiles that could run 80-100 miles per gallon of gasoline. The cruise missile program, at $11 billion, would equal the cost of bringing the annual rate of investment in public works back up to the 1965 level. Cost overruns to 1981 on the Navy's Trident and the Air Force's F-16 programs, $33 billion, could reconstruct or rebuild one-fifth of all the bridges in the U.S. The cost overrun, to 1981, on the Army's heavy tank program, $13 billion, equals the short fall of capital needed for maintaining water supplies of 150 U.S. cities until the year 2001. The cost overrun, to 1981, of the Army's UH-60A helicopter program, $4.7 billion, could restore all the roads, bridges, subways, buses and aqueducts in New York City. The MX missile program, projected at $34 billion, could be spent on a 10-year energy-efficiency effort to save 25-50 percent of U.S. oil imports."

-excerpted from an article by Manning Marable in the MILWAUKEE COURIER(9/19/81)

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Note: "Cost overrun" is a term we frequently come across in the news media, especially in connection with the U.S. military. What is a "cost overrun"? Suppose the U.S. government contracts with the Boeing Company to build a new plane and Boeing says the plane will cost a billion dollars. Suppose that, after the plane is built, Boeing informs the government that the cost is no longer one billion dollars but two and a half billion dollars. The difference, one and a half billion dollars, between the first figure and the second would be termed a "cost overrun." If a child takes a candy bar from a store without paying for it, the incident is termed "theft."

The HARAMBEE FLAME is published monthly by the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Nebraska State Pen. We encourage you to send comments, articles, poetry, etc. c/o the editor, David L. Rice--P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, Neb.; 68502.

AN AFRIKAN COUPLE RESOLVES A PROBLEM

(The following incident is relayed to us via The Forest People, an anthropological study of the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest by Colin Turnbull. Aside from the humor value of this story, it serves to illustrate the importance of community cohesion in the maintenance of the family.)

"....The other major activity that goes on almost every day in any Pygmy camp is the repairing and alteration of the huts. New leaves have to be added, or the old ones changed to avoid leaks. If relatives come to visit, either the house has to be enlarged or a new one built. Whenever this happens there are repercussions throughout the camp, since people will have to change the entrances to their huts to avoid looking directly into the stranger's hut. The entrances also get changed if there are arguments between two families. The two disputants, though they may be next door to each other, will build little "spite fences" between them, so that their huts are turned almost back to back, the walls in effect turning the doorways to face in opposite directions. Then the doorway may face into someone else's hut, and if that family is not in sympathy, their doorway in turn will be changed, and so on.

These changes are usually made by the women, since the hut is considered the woman's property. This is one of the strongest points a woman has in arguments with her husband. I have seen a woman who has failed to get anywhere in a matrimonial disagreement simply turn around and start methodically pulling all the leaves off the hut. Usually the husband stops her halfway. In this case, however, the husband was particularly stubborn. He waited until she had taken all the leaves off, then remarked to the camp at large that his wife was going to be dreadfully cold that night. There was nothing for her to do, without losing face, but to continue; so reluctantly and very slowly, she started to pull out the sticks that formed the framework of her home.

By this time the camp was agog, because it had been a long time since anyone had seen a domestic argument carried quite this far. The poor woman was in tears, for she was very much in love with her husband, and the final step, if he did not stop her, was for her to pack her few belongings and walk off, having completely demolished their home first. Then she would return to the home of her parents. It is the nature of a Pygmy never to admit he is wrong, and the husband was beginning to feel equally anxious. Things had gone too far for either of them to patch up the quarrel without being shamed in the eyes of all those who were watching to see what would happen next. He sat silent, hugging his knees, looking as miserable as his wife. Then he brightened up suddenly and turned around to see how far the demolition had gone. Only a few sticks had been pulled out. He called to his wife not to bother with the sticks, it was only the leaves that were dirty. She looked at him with a puzzled 'Ayiiiiii?'---and then, understanding, asked him to help her carry the leaves down to the stream. This they did, and together they gravely washed every single leaf and brought them back. While she joyfully put the leaves back on the hut he stoked up the fire and then went off with his bow and arrows to see if he could find some game to bring back for a special dinner.

The pretense was that she had been taking the leaves off not because she was angry, but because they were dirty and attracted ants and spiders. Nobody believed this, but everyone was glad the quarrel was over. For several days women talked politely about the insects in the leaves of their huts, and took a few leaves down to the stream to wash, as if this was a perfectly normal procedure. I have never seen it done before or since."

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SHERRY

my eyelids blink
to ease the burning sensation
of blind emotion that should not be
so here
so sad sitting on the riverbank
watching life go by dreaming
i planted an idea
it became my sun
i wanted to touch it
to be hurt by it so i could draw
nearer to it
and the sun and peace and the earth
are not so large after all
for no matter where i turn to run
to hide
to slow down
the train is an early morning express
going nowhere
but back to the fact that love
is cruel and real and
sitting on the riverbank
and laughing at me
daring me
taunting me
reminding me that
to get off you need
a ticket
and i got a ticket for running
a redlight
for feeling and needing freedom
and air and sunshine 'cause tomorrow
can only be as real as is today.

(The above poem is by Will Otey and will appear in his first and forthcoming book of poetry, AND I AM LIKE A LEAF.)

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HANDLE WITH CARE

This instrument is irreplaceable.
It is made of fragile substances.
It must be treated with tender love
and care.

This instrument is the fountain of life.
It is forever squirting the juice
to satisfy the body's thirst.
It must not be contaminated.

This instrument is the drum of time.
From it comes such beautiful music.
It plays the music that sets the whole
body in motion;
music that makes you love all creation.

With this instrument I could live
forever,
but now it has been broken.
Only time and understanding will
mend it again.

This instrument shall never be
the same again.
It need not worry--I shall protect it
from future misfortune.
I shall dress it in armadillo armor,
surround it with the spines of a porcupine,
and place it at the end of a rainbow
that will ever stretch the sky.
I pledge to it all these things
so that I may live,
but I shall never love again.
This instrument is my heart.

-Burl Holloman, Jr.

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MODEL X/UNIT 32599

my blackness is functional
to a certain degree
it is
and always will be
tucked away there
in its compartment
sensitive for the time of rescue
and escape
its chance to shine
a lonely thing it is
with the whiteness stripped away
but self-sufficient
strong
and easily predictable
seventy-five percent of all models
programmed as intended
accept religion
show proper fawning
submissive characteristics necessary
to erase original
RACIAL MEMORY DATA
with minimum energy output
this model in its present strain
a malfunction
originally introduced
minus 395 years...
my blackness is functional
to a certain degree.

-Robert Thomas